The Media States that: “The Boston Teachers Union Supports the Retention of Incompetent Teachers”

NO, WE DON’T!

By Richard Stutman, BTU President

Whether it appears in the Globe, Herald, Channel 5, or the Boston Phoenix – it doesn’t really matter – you hear or read it all the time in one form or another: The Boston Teachers Union supports the retention of incompetent teachers. No, we do not. We neither encourage incompetent teaching nor condone it. We don’t represent teachers because they are incompetent. We don’t represent teachers because they are competent. We represent teachers. Period. That’s our job. We work hard to insure due process, so that all of our teachers receive fairness and equity in all matters. That’s our job, too.

Another part of our job is to make sure all of our teachers are good. We want them to continually improve, and if they cannot or do not work effectively, we want them to get the help they need. We insist on it, just as you do. And we have negotiated contract language to effect teacher improvement. In the last bargain for the 2006-2010 contract, we negotiated to obtain peer assistants to help our struggling members. In the current ongoing bargain we have submitted a range of other ideas that we believe will improve the skills of our teachers.

No teacher wants an incompetent teacher next door. Neither does the Boston Teachers Union. In fact, the BTU leadership has 21 children and grandchil- dren in (or fairly recently graduated from) our schools. No parent wants an incompetent teacher teaching his or her child. We want good teachers and good schools.

The protection of due process rights and the expectation of good teaching in our schools are not mutually exclusive. When some opine that we protect incompetent teachers, they presumably want you to imagine that we also tolerate bad schools and practices because, they say, we put the protection of our teachers first and foremost above the academic quality of our school. Why do they say that about the BTU? Because they know that condoning poor schools is indefensible. And if they hang that label on us then the public will disrespect what we do and everything we say. This purposeful mislabeling of what we and other teacher unions do fits in rather neatly with the agenda of those who wish to minimize the strength of unions.

So how do we answer? In a few ways...

We don’t condone incompetent teachers or poor schools. But it is not our job to root out teachers who are ineffective. That’s the job and responsibility of management. That’s not a cop out on our end. It’s not an excuse. School principals are supposed to manage the school – after all they’ve been given tremendous authority under the new Ed Reform law. A good part of management includes conducting meaningful performance evaluations on teachers. If teachers are having difficulty, their supervisors are expected to monitor their progress and work with them to make them more effective. If that help is meaningful, sincere, and positive, and if the teacher cannot or will not change or adapt, then the manager – not the union – has an obligation to move forward and bring the matter to a head. Those who continually blame the union for condoning bad performance are trying to distract us from their own incompetence.

At the same time we have an obligation to represent the teacher to insure that his or her due process rights are respected. And we do so proudly. We further have an obligation to insure that administrative assistance is positive and skillful, not negative and ineffective. We insist on that as well. After all, we all want to improve our skills, and the district is obligated to help us to become more effective. Long story short, give us the tools and the resources to succeed and then hold us accountable. That’s what good, responsible management does. And that’s what the BTU expects.

One Nation Rally draws over 100,000 to Washington, DC
Leadership or the Lack of It

By Charles R. Johnson
BTU Secretary-Treasurer

Dr. Carol Johnson, along with a number of other superintendents from around the country, has recently signed a manifesto entitled “How to Fix Our Schools: A Manifesto by Joel Klein, Michelle Rhee and other education leaders.” It was published in the Washington Post and endorsed by sixteen superintendents. Two of the superintendents who endorsed the manifesto have already resigned: Michelle Rhee in D.C. and Ron Huberman in Chicago, who replaced Arne Duncan. A third endorser, Arlene Ackerman in Philadelphia, announced that she never signed the manifesto and sent a letter opposing it, calling its goals much too “simpleistic.”

I have questions about the professional responsibility of these educational leaders. They are responsible for the success of students. The superintendents who signed the manifesto think that superintendents need to take over public education. This is disturbing to see Boston’s superintendent endorsing a manifesto that supports the outsourcing of education. What can we expect next if the educational leadership thinks that the teachers and paraprofessionals (who hired them) cannot educate the students entrusted to them? We are in a time that assumes that the teaching force is deficient. Statistics confirm that too many who join the teaching profession leave before their fifth of service. Most teachers that leave universally sight leadership concerns and the lack of being viewed as a professional as principle reasons for leaving. This reaffirms the need to elect a teacher training and support for those that are actively teaching in the classroom.

Yet we rarely hear about the failure of leadership in public education. The evaluation of leadership is finally being considered as a variable. We know that questionable leadership can fail teachers and have a deleterious influence on the success of the school community. We as teachers and paraprofessionals are dependent on leadership for success, just as our students are.

Our superintendent has endorsed the opening of a charter school in our district. This is an indictment on the effectiveness of leadership. They are telling us that they are incapable of running the schools effectively for the students; therefore they want a private entity to step in. This is a costly step in the learning out of more schools because of central leadership deficiencies. If this is true, then why do we want to pay the salary of a superintendent?

Our school committee (i.e., the mayor) will come to the realization that they and the superintendent have outfitted their use-futile agent. This agent could act as the fiduciary agent and the D.O.E. would monitor the schools.

Teachers and paraprofessionals are not going to seek public systems if those responsible for their operation continue to support privatization. It is obvious that the leaders who signed and supported outsourcing should not consider themselves as objective leaders in support of large public school districts. The pressure on our school system rests on our members, but the largest variable influencing our success is our leadership. Looking at what is presently happening in our system, it is difficult to see good leadership at every school site. Teachers do not want to work in another classroom, but will the support they need for success in their classrooms and schools be there? The children of Boston will not survive this if answer is anything but “YES.”

Commentary: Michael J. Maguire

Some people may be waiting for Superman, not I. Waiting is passive. Furthermore, our superintendent is waiting for school board action by (our sun weren’t yellow, you’d have never heard of Clark Kent).

Batman, however, is a teacher’s kind of hero. Batman uses his intellect to solve problems. Gotham’s leadership respects Batman for his expertise. Finally, Batman doesn’t seek the spotlight.

As director of a documentary as Waiting For Superman is, it does give us unionized teachers a chance to educate the public about the shortcomings of our current system of education. Granted we may have to shout to be heard above the noise of this “super propaganda, but education is the topic of the day we need to have something to say.

We are not faster than a speeding bullet; though we are asked to run faster and faster and as more and more tasks are given to us without sufficient time to complete them.

We are not more powerful than a locomotive; but do we have the ability to get children to sit still, listen, ponder the world, and say they’re sorry when they’ve done wrong.

We cannot leap over tall buildings in a single bound; but will the support and major societal obstacles with grace and ease.

We can, however, use our intellect to battle the modern day Riddlers, Dokers, and Eggheads. Riddler me this, how can taking millions of dollars out of the BPS improve education? What’s so funny about denying non-English speakers the time and attention needed to become (af)fluent? How many policy wonks does it take to improve education?

Admittedly, one of Batman’s greatest resources is his (or Bruce Wayne’s) wealth. With that money he can afford to build devices. Since he didn’t have to work a 9 to 5 job, he had the time to fight crime.

While we individually may not be wealthy and we may not have an abundance of free time, we have bound ourselves together to form a union. We have pooled our dues to pay for others to work on our behalf. We use that money and those individuals to fight educational crime.

However, we can’t sit back and ask others – even our union leadership – to do our job. We as individuals need to take action. Just like Batman took to the streets of Gotham to fight crime, we need to take to the airwaves to combat gross misinformation on talk radio. We must write letters to the Globe and Herald and comment on their online editions. We must attend union and school committee meetings. We need to volunteer on political campaigns to elect people who will support our cause. Just as in the classroom, in the civic forums we must make sure that the right answers are the ones heard loudest, last, and best.

This work must be in conjunction with what our union does. It clearly is not enough for us to just sit back and wait for others to do our work. Waiting is passive. Waiting gets us situations like Superman

In short, we need to become our own Batman. We teachers need to take charge of our education. Just like Gotham can’t handle crime without Batman’s assistance, it seems evident that Massachusetts can’t manage education without our assistance. We can’t leave educational policy up to the “Harvey Dents” of the world who say one thing and then do another. We are all Bruce Wayne. Will we all respond to today’s educational Bat Signal? Or will we continue to wait for Superman?
When are training opportunities for School Site Council Members?

SSC Trainings for individuals and school teams will be held on the following dates & topics:

- **School Site Council Basics** – 11/15, Tuesday (6:30 – 7:30) & repeated on 11/29, Monday (4:00 – 6:00) both @ BTU
- **SSC Budget Basics** with BPS CFO John McDonough - 12/7, Tuesday (5:30 – 7:30) & repeated on 12/21, Tuesday (4:00 – 6:00) both @ BTU
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*Please RSVP for specific dates to Caren Carew (BUNITY)! at least a full week prior to a training.

Can a School Site Council (SSC) Meeting be called anytime?

**What constitutes a quorum?**

Who sets the agenda and where are the minutes?

The School Site Council is the central governing body of the school under the school-based management/shared decision making model. See (orange) BTU contract pages 14 – 27. At the first meeting of the newly elected SSC (WHICH SHOULD BE HELD NO LATER THAN 10/31), a monthly calendar should be agreed upon by the SSC members for the entire school year and be made public through distribution of all staff and parents. Any change to this calendar must be approved by the SSC with at least one week’s notice to all staff and parents. SSC Meetings should be at times convenient for all members. Times of the meetings may alternate to meet this goal.

A quorum of SSC members must be present to conduct SSC business, make decisions, and the like. Without a quorum, it is just another meeting as no decisions may be rendered; only discussed. A quorum is constituted by the presence of the Principal, at least two teachers and two parents for Councils with 9 – 12 voting members; at least three teachers and three parents for Councils with 13 or more voting members. **Agendas for Meetings are set by the SSC members.** Items for the agenda can be submitted by members of the SSC and school community at large to a Co-Chair to be included on the agenda, as long as the items fall within the scope of SSC’s authority. Minutes of SSC Meetings should include the agenda, date, time, location, members present or absent, action(s) taken and must adhere to quorum requirements. Under this provision of the law, there should be no reason for the SSC to go into executive session.

**What is the Peer Assistance Program?**

The Peer Assistance Program is a co-operative partnership between the Boston Teachers Union and the Boston Public Schools. In existence since 2007, it is designed to improve and support the teaching and learning performance of the teachers. Participation by teachers is voluntary and is not mandated.

**What is the Peer Assistance Program for You?**

We provide confidential support for permanent teachers. We work with two main groups of teachers. If you have received a performance rating of ‘Needs Improvement’ **Meet Standards** – formal evaluation, your principal, colleague or building representative may recommend the program to assist with implementation of any existing prescriptions and/or recommendations. The program is also available for teachers who would like to continue to refine and hone some aspect of their practice, such as a focus on lesson planning, classroom management and assessment.

**About our Work**

We realize that each teacher’s situation is different. While all our work is confidential and non-evaluative, together we work:

- Focus on the Eight Dimensions of Effective Teaching
- Reflect to increase student engagement and learning
- Find and create teaching resources and materials
- Collaborate with other teachers and school leaders.

On-site support is dictated by your individualized needs. Together we will decide the length and focus of our work.

Who are the Peer Assistants?

We are experienced and certified BPS teachers with ten or more years of classroom experience. We have been trained to support teachers using best practices as identified by the Boston Public Schools. We are active learners who stay current with professional development priorities in education.

What else you need to know:

The Peer Assistance program does not interrupt or replace the evaluation process.

- The priority and intent of the program is to focus learning and professional success.
- How do I sign up or get more information?

If you or anyone you know might benefit from these resources in the program, email Michael McLaughlin at mmclaughlin@btu.org or fill out the interest form in the left side of the front page of My Learning Plan (http://www.mylearningplan.com/)

You can also request an informational brochure from your building representative or from the BTU main office.

It's Your Peer Assistance Program!

By Charles Kanelos, James Liu, Patricia Wicks, and Carolyn Taber

Are you overwhelmed by the district mandates related to your content area or instructional implementation? Have you recently received administrative feedback that was a surprise to you? Are you looking to refine or do you need support? We’re here to help.

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Edward Moscovitch, an MIT professor, was the keynote speaker at this year’s BTU Building Representative’s conference. In the summer edition of CommonWealth Magazine, Mr. Moscovitch published a detailed, data driven report that asserts that there is no difference in the “quality of instruction” between urban and the suburban teachers. Furthermore, Mr. Moscovitch contends it is possible to get low income and minority children to perform at high levels but that teachers are not given the tools to meet these challenges. But the early years are critical, kindergarten and 1st grade. Mr. Moscovitch divided that Massachusetts’ student population into five categories: poor White/Asian, not-poorg white/Asian, poor Black/Hispanic, non-poorg Black/Hispanic, and non-English speaking Black/Hispanic. (Statically there are too few non-English speaking white/Asian). Moscovitch then tracked the progress of students in these categories. When he took into account the students’ circumstances as outlined above, Moscovitch found significant increases in numbers of students from so-called under performing categories: poor White/Asian, not-poor white/Asian, poor Black/Hispanic, non-poor Black/Hispanic, and non-English speaking Black/Hispanic. (Statically there are too few non-English speaking white/Asian). Moscovitch then tracked the progress of students in these categories. When he took into account the students’ circumstances as outlined above, Moscovitch found significant difference in the quality of instruction of teachers from so-called under performing school versus successful schools.

Mr. Moscovitch points out that in one part of the students’ education, statistically, there can be great teacher impact. This area is the few years of kindergarten and first grade. “What you teach kids (in the earliest grades) matters more than who is teaching,” says Moscovitch. In schools where teachers had good pedagogical tools he found significant increases in numbers of students who scored in proficient categories. But for students who did not receive this teaching until the 2nd grade virtually none moved into proficiency by 3rd grade.

By third grade, cautions Moscovitch, it is nearly impossible to close the achievement gap between the above-mentioned five categories.

How you can move kids and change schools

“There is no one thing,” says Moscovitch. “There are several. And you have to do them all and do them well.”

1. The schools need a road map, a plan, and a belief that they can do it.
2. You have to assess every kid, and you have to assess them fairly often. (Not MCAS which takes 3-5 months to get data, but in-house tests. Thrice yearly for everyone; weekly for strugglers.)
3. You have to put students in small groups and differentiate to address students at appropriate level. This is critical.
4. You have to use research based pedagogy – scope and sequence, and link phonics to comprehension.
5. You need first-rate principal leadership with data meetings and walkthroughs.
6. School improvement has to be a team effort. You cannot turn a school around one teacher at a time. Everybody’s got to be on the same page, and all teachers need to buy into the change.
7. RTI – Systematic, early intervention based on needs not labels, guided by data to see if it is working.
8. There needs to be a school-based reading coach.
9. And all schools need an outside partner.

Mr. Moscovitch’s Closing Observations

It is important to motivate teachers with praise. And food helps too. Good data can help empower teachers. Praise is a more powerful motivator than criticism.

Dr. F. Lee Jones, Ellison Parks Early Education Center, asking Ed Moscovitch a question.

Paula Yedman, Fifield Elementary School, reading Ed Moscovitch’s article.

Richard Stutman holding up Ed Moscovitch’s article.

Does someone you know work at a charter school?

AFT Massachusetts needs your help reaching out to employees of Massachusetts charter schools in order to share with them important information regarding:

❖ A voice in decision making
❖ Quality professional development opportunities
❖ Job security
❖ Competitive salaries and benefits
❖ Classroom resources

For more information, contact Dan Justice at justice65@gmail.com or call 802-324-5886.

Learn more about AFT’s Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff by visiting: www.aftact.org

by Michael Maguire and Garret Virchick

Teachers seem to resist change at first but tend to embrace that very same change later if it is brought to them by a principal/leader who understands how to bring people together. They need to be doing the little things like taking a small group, or doing lunch duty, bringing in food, and finding other ways to thank teachers.

The principals should not be afraid to tell teachers what they expect, but then give them room to teach and not be a micro-manager. Principals who want too much to be liked will not succeed and ultimately will less popular than those who set high standards.

Professional Development must be inclusive. It is less effective if one teacher goes and then brings it back than if the whole staff can go and then follow it up with hands-on help at school. Have a limited number of PD topics and have the maximum number of staff attend.

Schools were teachers visit each other’s classrooms tend to be the most successful. Principal and reading coaches need to be freely and constantly in classes not to harass, but to help. There needs to be consistent central office support. And the happiest faculties, Mr. Moscovitch noted, are in schools where kids perform well – even though teachers are working very, very hard.
Bullying Discussed at the BTU Rep. Conference

By Michael J. Maguire

At the 2010 Building Representatives Conference, Attorney Matthew Dwyer updated the BTU Reps on the newly passed Anti-Bullying Legislation. Here is an excerpt from his presentation and handout:

On May 3, 2010 the Commonwealth, largely in response to growing concerns at all levels of public school communities, passed legislation amending G.L.c.71 §37o and enabling an entirely new law, G.L.c.71 §37o. The new law now requires that every district-wide policy on school discipline prohibit “bullying” and contain a “bullying prevention and intervention plan.”

1. Development of The Plan

School districts must provide age-appropriate instruction, in each grade, on bullying prevention using an “evidence-based” curriculum and develop, adhere to and update a bullying prevention and intervention plan. The plan is to be developed in consultation with a wide array of school and non-school personnel including teachers, administrators, law enforcement agencies, students, parents and community representatives. The consultative process, in the case of a public school district, must provide for a public notice and comment period.

2. Required Plan Contents

Required content extends to these twelve features:

(1) descriptions of bullying, cyber-bullying and retaliation and statements that are prohibited
(2) clear reporting procedures
(3) a stated willingness to accept anonymous reports of bullying or retaliation
(4) clear response and investigative procedures
(5) the range of disciplinary sanctions of bullying or retaliations
(6) strategies for protecting these actual or potential witnesses or reporters of bullying;
(7) procedures governing notice to the affected parents or guardians of victims and perpetrators alike, and where appropriate, law enforcement (DESE to promulgate regulations on principal’s duties)
(8) a statement warning of the disciplinary consequences of a “knowingly false” accusation of bullying by a student
(9) a strategy for providing counseling to victims, perpetrators and their families or for referring them to appropriate agencies for counseling
(10) a provision for ongoing professional development of all staff members, both academic and non-academic, to identify, prevent and respond to bullying (the requirement inclusions in the professional development are detailed in the law)
(11) provisions for notifying parents about and guardians about the bullying prevention curriculum of the district or school including how they can reinforce the curriculum, the dynamics of bullying and online safety and cyber-bullying
(12) provisions for notifying parents about and guardians about the bullying prevention curriculum of the district or school including how they can reinforce the curriculum, the dynamics of bullying and online safety and cyber-bullying

3. Notice of The Plan

* Parents and Guardians:
  (i) must receive “written, annual notice” of the plan
  (ii) notice must be provided of all “relevant student-related sections of the plan”
  (iii) language of the plan must be “age-appropriate”
  (iv) the plan must be written in the languages(s) most prevalent among the students and parents
* Staff
  (i) notice is required to “all school staff”
  (ii) written, and given annually
  (iii) “faculty and staff shall be trained annually on the plan applicable to the school”
  (iv) “all relevant sections...relating to the duties of faculty and staff shall be included in a school district or school employee handbook.” G.L. c.37o(e) (2)

Plan Implementation:

School and Teacher Responsibilities

The principal has primary responsibility for implementation and oversight of the plan at the school level. The duty of reporting devolves upon everyone (e.g. mandated reporters) and a report of any bullying or retaliation witnessed by that staff member, or any instance of which that staff member has become aware. Reports of bullying are to be immediately reported to either the principal or the school official identified in the plan as the authorized recipient of reports of bullying.

In the next edition, bullying defined.
One Nation Rally draws over 100,000 to Washington, DC
Demands for Jobs, Education, Justice and an End to War inspire the crowd

On October 2nd, trains, buses, cars, bicycles and feet carried thousands to The Mall in Washington, DC for the One Nation March. First called for by the Service Employees International Union and the NAACP, the rally helped unite many more unions and community groups in one of the most diverse rallies seen in DC in a very long time. The American Federation of Teachers signed on during our summer convention and you could not go ten feet anywhere during the rally without seeing blue and orange AFT T-shirt declaring One Nation Working Together on a determined teacher in the crowd.

The rally was truly a rainbow event. There were black people, brown people, red people, yellow people and white people. Young people and old people, union members, community workers, and students. The unemployed, the underemployed, and the overworked. Pro-labor activists, immigrant rights activists, anti-war activists, education activists all determined to march under one banner demanding justice during a time when increasingly the haves are targeting the have-nots. Jobs, Justice, and Education were common themes as many speakers at the rally pointed to Wall Street bankers as the real problem in our country.

AFT President Randi Weingarten spoke forcefully on the podium about the importance of a quality education as the foundation for everything that the rally was demanding. She noted that access to an excellent education is a basic civil right and still be denied to many children in our schools. Her demand that “This must change!” was echoed by The Roverend Frederick Haynes, senior pastor at Friendship-West Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. He vowed to stand with the American Federation of Teachers and “Bring our fingers together into a mighty fist and strike a blow for justice!”

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka reminded the crowd there is nothing we can’t do when we stand together. He also cautioned the crowd that some in our country seek to keep us fearful and apart and “that behind the voices of fear and hatred are the forces of greed, the moneyed powers that put us in the economic mess we’re in today.” He asked that those at the rally to “Promise that you won’t let anybody divide us, or turn us against each other. And promise that you will make your voices heard – for good jobs, justice, and education.”

Many in the crowd compared the rally to the one called by Fox News’s Glenn Beck and the Tea Party movement a few weeks earlier. Most concluded that the number of people at One Nation was significantly higher. But more important was the content of the crowd and the demands. Although the placards at Tea Party events often cite liberty it is nothing like the kind of liberty sung about in the Revolutionary War’s Liberty Song. The song was first published in the Boston Gazette in 1778. It was the first modern reference to united we stand and divided we fall. While tea partiers often use division to sell their message, at One Nation was significantly higher. But more important was the content of the rally to the one called by Fox News’s Glenn Beck and the Tea Party movement a few weeks earlier. Most concluded that the number of people at One Nation was significantly higher. But more important was the content of the rally.

An Open Letter to Dr. Carol Johnson

Good Morning Dr. Johnson,

My name is Bruce Collotta and I am a teacher at the Community Academy of Science and Health. A couple of weeks ago, you came out with your proposal to close the Hyde Park Educational Complex. The reason given was that H.P.E.C. is a so-called “underperforming” school. Students and parents at H.P.E.C. were told that students would be given the choice of attending what you referred to as “higher performing” schools come next September.

The staff at Hyde Park has researched and studied the test scores from all of the high schools in Boston and it is pretty obvious to us that if 1100 students are moved, many, if not most, will not be attending “better schools.” Although most of us are aware that money and the future of this building were factors in this decision, neither was given as reasons for the closing.

I believe you care deeply for all of the children in BPS but this proposal does not prove it to the H.P.E.C. community. This proposed closure would cause a disruption in the lives of approximately 1100 families. So many of these families already have difficult and challenging social and economic issues and this plan will add to these problems.

These children and their families need stability. The H.P.E.C. provides these students and families with a stable, nurturing and academically rigorous environment. We offer our kids hope, confidence, love and commitment. We encourage our kids daily. We feed them. We have teachers that stay after school working with these kids until 5, 6, 7, even 8 o’clock at night!

We are three small learning communities with about 350 kids in each. MCAS scores at all three schools increased last year. Small schools work! Our kids like their school. They don’t want to move. They feel safe here.

The day after the community meeting I asked close to 100 students if they felt safe here. Their response was an emphatic, unanimous yes. However, many of them are extremely nervous or downright scared about travelling to and attending some of the other schools in the city.

With all of the anxieties our kids deal with every day, please don’t add to that by causing them to worry about their safety. I am asking you to help them.

On behalf of the entire H.P.E.C. community I am asking you to reconsider closing our school. Come to our school again and talk to our kids. Tell them that you and the school committee have made a decision and give them another year or two to show continued improvement. Show the H.P.E.C. community that you have heard their pleas and are willing to allow them another chance. We give our students second, third and fourth chances all the time. Please do the same.

If this closing is a budget issue and you need to reconfigure the school with a business partnership, please use the students and staff already in place and reconfigure the complex into one school that will meet you and the mayor’s objectives.

Thank you.

(Mr. Collotta at the 2010 BTU Building Representatives Conference read the above letter to Dr. Johnson.)
BPS Superintendent
Dr. Carol Johnson
Attends BTU Rep. Conference

Superintendent Dr. Carol Johnson addresses the BTU Rep. Conference.

Teacher Bill Barfus asks a question of the Superintendent.

Tarijsha Janey, Murphy School; and Mary Moran, Clapp ES

Ronnie Ho, Josiah Quincy School

Helen Irvin, Tynan ES

Pam Holland

Photos by Michael J. Maguire

Diversity was a hallmark of the One Nation March.

Many teachers from the AFT could be seen all through the rally.

Photos by Garret Virchick

These young students learned firsthand about the issues that are confronting us.

Tens of thousands marched in and out all day during the rally.

The One Nation rally in front of the reflecting pool and WWII Memorial.

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We’re Learning Here

**A project by Amika Kemmler Ernst, Ph.D.**

**MARSHALL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

A visitor to the Marshall cannot miss two giant bulletin boards in the front hallway about the school’s focus on reading. Directed toward families, they feature large graphs showing how attendance and home reading impacts MCAS scores. This data is surrounded by inspirational quotes and exhortations such as the following, by Dr. Seuss:

“...The more you read, The more you’ll know,
The more you know, The more places you’ll go!”

It was not surprising, then, that most classes were working on reading activities of various kinds throughout the morning of my visit: reading aloud, reading in groups, and/or reading independently.

I felt grateful to Cyndi Wekees, Dean of Discipline, for showing me around and easing my entry into each classroom. Later, when interviewing students, I was given a map of the school to help me find my way to particular classrooms – a first, in my experience, and a reminder of one of the ways that a school can be welcoming to families. Although the Marshall is located in a high poverty neighborhood that has more than its share of violence, it seems to offer a safe haven for those who enter. They have a beautiful new library and a “Peace Garden” just outside the cafeteria where students may go to read or remember classmates who have been killed.

The Marshall has approximately 750 students, grouped into “pods” and cross-grade “families” to facilitate communication and shared activity. One such activity is “All Night,” during which each grade-level team prepares thematic presentations celebrating multiple intelligences. Another school-wide activity that interested me was the Marshall’s “Principal of the Day” program. Fourth and fifth graders are invited to write a persuasive letter about why they should be principal for a day; every week those selected (this year by their peers) spend a day observing in classrooms, taking notes, and talking with principal Teresa Harvey-Jackson over lunch about ways to improve the school’s climate. Fifth grade Felix Polanco asked me to tell you that the Marshall “is a great school,” and the teachers with whom I spoke seemed to agree. Ms. Lazko shared the following comments:

“We are a community with high expectations for children and teachers. As a fourth grade SEL teacher I’m faced with challenges every day, such as having newcomers who speak little or no English and trying to address the diverse learning styles of my kids. But none of this is an obstacle in my classroom because my students (or scholars, as I call them) come in positive, prepared, and polite every day. I know my students are learning when they can solve their own problems. To me that’s more than just rewarding, it’s an exhilarating purpose. We’ve learned that if you write well, using interesting vocabulary, you can entertain, or to change your mind about something. We’re also learning how to read more difficult words.”

– Ms. Lazko’s Grade 4 Scholars

We were in our reading group with Ms. Rubin. We’re getting more fluent and learning how to use the glossary in non-fiction books. Every week our teacher records us and we can hear that our reading is getting smoother and we pronounce words more clearly.

– Takeria Allen-Williams, Kharii Baxter-Awogbora, Jonathan Monteiro & Sammy Holman, Grade 5

We were paying attention to our teacher when she was reading a story. She was asking us to figure out the author’s purpose. We’ve learned that authors write to inform, to entertain, or to change your mind about something. We’re also learning how to read more difficult words.

– Ms. Lazko’s Grade 4 Scholars

We were Principal and Assistant Principal of the Day. In this picture we were revising our notes from visiting classes all over the school. We observed teachers and students, then met with Ms. Jackson to talk about problems and how to fix them. We’ve learned that if you write well, using interesting vocabulary, you can succeed. We also learned that being a school principal is a big responsibility!

– Penelope Soto & Felix Polanco, Grade 5

**Philbrick Students Featured in Canadian Publication**

Last year’s first grade class (now second graders!) at the John D. Philbrick School in Roslindale, were featured in an article in the summer edition of the Saskatchewan Writers’ Guild. Canadian children’s author Jean Freeman (and grandmother of a student in class) visited students last fall to talk about her books and encourage students with their own writing; by the end of the school year, students were able to share with her a copy of the poetry book they created.

– Erik Berg

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*Amika Kemmler Ernst is a recently retired BPS New Teacher Developer with extensive experience as a classroom teacher, curriculum developer, and graphic artist. Her “We’re Learning Here” Project features images of everyday learning in our public schools, along with the words of the students pictured.*
Quality Education as a Constitutional Right…

(continued from page 5)

ies. The stories of the schools that service these children would shock anyone. What is more shocking is the legal defense made by California to abdicate its responsibility to provide a quality education to all its citizens. While there has been a settlement reached she reminds us of the importance of community based organizing in holding the state accountable. Also in the book we find examples of pedagogical practice that can succeed in providing educational quality for racial minorities in our public schools. One article, Is This School?, is written by Boston teacher Alicia Carroll. Currently a New Teacher Developer and board member of the Boston Teachers Union School, Carroll examines the importance of building on the cultural capital of the children in our classrooms, setting up the classroom environment, and creating curricular units that reflect this pedagogy. She points to the importance of building on the rich cultural experiences that our students bring with them into the classroom rather than the deficits that too often become the central theme in our schools. She writes about the importance of connecting with family and community and setting up a student centered classroom community. Finally she writes of the kinds of curriculum she has helped developed that acknowledges students as scholars. Throughout her essay she commits to educational equity for all children illuminates her writing.

In the last essay in the book entitled Culturally Responsive Pedagogies, Lisa Delapl, renowned author of Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom, tries to cut through the despair that so many exhausted urban teachers feel about the situations we face. Throughout her essay she exhorts us to see the brilliance in our students, teach them more content not less, demand critical thinking, challenge racist sociopolitical views, and build on the cultural experiences of our children. She laments the state mandated tests that exacerbates the problems and keeps students from learning the things in our schools that service neighborhoods made of predominantly Latino and African American families.

The soft spoken but powerful voice of Bob Moses was heard in my mind as I read his essay Constitutional Property vs. Constitutional People. This essay looks at the struggles of African Americans to move from property to citizenship in 4 historical periods: the middle passage and slave era of the late 18th century, the post civil war of the late 19th century, the civil rights movement of the mid 20th century, and the contemporary period. Moses weaves story after story with the myths of the mid 20th century, and the contemporary period. Moses weaves story after story with the historical moment in which each took place to give us a flavor of what a people have gone through to gain what too many of us take for granted...an education. Whether through the story of Somerset, personal slave to a Scottish merchant who successfully petitioned an English court and “inspired” our founding fathers to burn into the constitution the “Somerset clause” so that they might maintain their property. Or through his personal stories as a young man meeting Ella Baker and beginning his work in SNCC. Moses takes us on a journey that kept me asking the question: When...If not now?

Princeton professor of African American Studies Imani Perry and former presidential professor in educational equity at UCLA and current director of education and scholarship at the Ford Foundation Jeannie Oakes gives us two pieces that examine the legal struggles that have gone on and continue to go on about educational inequities. In Reading, Writing, and Rights, Perry examines the historical context and legal intricacies when dealing with the Constitution. She reminds us that since there is no such guaranteed federal right to education that many efforts to guarantee quality education have centered around violations of equal protection provisions and the rights of equal protection. Perry reminds us then of the teachings of Howard Zinn who states that activism, not constitutionalism has created many of the legal victories we hold dear.

In her essay Schools That Shock the Conscience, Jeannie Oakes educates us about current struggles and litigations in California around schools that service neighborhoods made of predominantly Latino and African American families. She reminds us that this struggle is one of connecting with family and community and setting up a student centered classroom community. Finally she writes of the kinds of curriculum she has helped developed that acknowledges students as scholars. Throughout her essay she commits to educational equity for all children illuminates her writing.

Professional Development in Boston Public Schools:

Responses to the Elevator Question

Twenty-four teachers responded to the ‘elevator question,’ directed at Dr. Irvin Scott, Chief Academic Officer, BPS. The question was “If you had 30 seconds on an elevator with Dr. Scott, what would you tell him about professional development offered by the BCPS?”

Responses varied widely and came from every level (Early Childhood through High School, including SPED teachers, SEL, and general education). Although every discipline was represented including Vocational Education.

Several Science teachers wrote to say that the PD offered by the Science department is the best they have ever had: “relevant”, “engaging”, “hands-on”. “I’ve never felt that you were just sitting in a room...not talked down to”...“Keep it going”.

Some Science folks mentioned that PD on the school level is often a waste of time and does not meet their needs. In fact, this was a complaint of many teachers.

“What is advertised as PD is often nothing more than a glorified staff meeting where the Headmaster is giving administrative information that could better be handled in an email or memo. None of it ‘develops’ my ‘profession.’” Another wrote “some principals don’t know the difference between Professional Development and standing up in front and ‘lecturing’ to us as though we are naughty children.”

One teacher wrote “the best PD I have ever participated in was facilitated by classroom teachers who are doing my job. They understand the challenges we face daily and offer practical solutions.”

Another teacher wrote “I am a third year teacher in Boston and the PD I have received have been negative and unhelpful. The PD at Madison Park that were offered by the New Teacher Developers Office. The information was pertinent and to the point. I learned things at every session that I could immediately use in the classroom.”

“I never felt that I was wasting my time and enjoyed meeting new first year teachers who were facing the same struggles as I was.”

Conversely, another teacher stated “In my 16 years in BPS, all but two hours of the nearly 500 hours of PD have been wasted time. The exception was when MCAS scores were analyzed and we realized that many students were getting a certain type of question wrong. We worked on ways to help our students deal better with that type of question.”

Many, many teachers were quite put off by the Category trainings and called it the worst PD they ever experienced in their careers. Teachers were too many to mention but a few examples: the gist: “a cattle round-up”, “disorganized, sacrificed quality for quality”, from an ELL teacher...“the research in the Category trainings is very dated.” Another wrote “the Category teachers know absolutely nothing about adult learners.” Another: “boring, no new learning, forced participation.” There was not one positive comment about the category trainings.

On an up note, several elementary teachers were pleased with the Math department offerings and praised both the new learning and the professionalism of the facilitators. Another positive experience: a few Early Childhood teachers wrote to say that they felt the PD they were offered by the EC department was beneficial.

Other comments: “I LOVE good quality PD that helps me grow as a teacher. There is too little of it in Boston.” “I have experienced the range in Boston...from excellent to extremely poor.”

From several teachers of children with autism: “There is barely any training in this area. We need specific trainings related to our growing and changing field. Another two hours of Writers’ Workshop PD is a huge waste of my time, when our students are working on sitting, looking, holding pencils, and tracing.”

“We need more PD that focuses on children with severe disabilities.”

“The idea of ‘scaffolding’ the regular third grade curriculum is just out of the question.”

“Children with ELD learn best when they are taught in small groups and treating them eating skills and the most basic of communication skills. Boston is REALLY in the dark in this area.”

One teacher of SEI/SPED teachers wrote to say that she offered PD just not meet their needs and that the SPED department offers nothing useful or relevant beyond PECS and Boardmaker. “The SPED department needs a complete overhaul in the way they offer PD. It is a fact that SPED PD is awful and unhelpful to teachers who could offer better PD if asked. I absolutely do not need to sit through another lecture of ‘how wonderful’ this person was as a teacher at East Boston High School. It’s not about the person giving the PD, it is about how we can better respond to our students needs.”

More comments: “The best PD for me has been outside of my school...through the CLD, and the school district, but offered by local colleges, etc. In-house PD is nothing more than a staff meeting.”

“Much of the PD trainees treat experienced teachers with little

(continued on page 10)
The 92nd Infantry Division – World War II Association

By Charles R. Johnson

From October 8-10, 2010, the 92nd Infantry Division held its sixty-eighth reunion. It was held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Silver Spring, Maryland. The three-day program was assembled by the sons and daughters of the division and attended by twenty-three veterans. The 92nd, referred to as a black unit, was made up of black enlisted men and junior officers, but all higher-ranking officers were white. The 92nd Infantry Division dates back to the First World War and was reactivated during the Second World War. This group was assembled strictly along color lines and was commanded by Major General Edward M. Almond.

The 92nd began training in the fall of 1942. They were still referred to as “The Buffalo Soldiers” and wore the distinctive buffalo logo on their uniforms. This nickname stems from the view that the black soldiers’ hair is similar to the buffalo’s. Other stories make reference to the buffalo’s. The cemetery of buffalo skins worn by the soldiers began training in the fall of 1942, referred to as a black unit, the founders of teachers’ union UNNOH, and the beloved mentor of many students, Jean Filbert Louis, a mathematics teacher and member of the teachers’ union UNNOH; a math-gated British and French colonials and exiled Polocs, Czechs and Greeks. The Italian war front was fought repelling the allied British and French colonials and exiled Polocs, Czechs and Greeks.

In 1942 the US government, as a result of political pressure and out of necessity, finally allowed the 92nd to join the fight. This group was assembled by the sons and daughters of the division and attended by twenty-three veterans. The 92nd, referred to as a black unit, was made up of black enlisted men and junior officers, but all higher-ranking officers were white. The 92nd Infantry Division dates back to the First World War and was reactivated during the Second World War. This group was assembled strictly along color lines and was commanded by Major General Edward M. Almond.

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agenda.

one of the Phillip Pirrone Award recipients. Report Accepted.

Secretary read a thank you note sent to the RTC Board from Mary Jo Murphy; Paul Tenney and Linda McNamee.

Phil Fasano; Eileen Ganley; Donna Cooley-Hilton; Ruthanne Kennedy; business meeting to approve the eyeglass plan. Chair made the following motion C

OFFICERS

Secretary: The June 14 minutes were read and accepted. Secretary read a thank you note sent to the RTC Board from William O’Connell who thanked the RTC for selecting him as one of the Philip FIrinne Award recipients. Report Accepted. 

Chairman requested that his report take place later in the agenda.

Vice Chairman: Summer was slow; however, there were 20 new Delta members since June. There are now 1817 members, Vice Chairman submitted the Renewal Rates for the RTC. Renewal rates effective January 1, 2011 to December 31. 2011 are: $46.32 for single and $93.08 for family. Report Accepted.

COMMITTEES

Benefits: Benefits chair stated that we may have to vote prior to the September 30 business meeting to approve the eyeglass plan. Chair made the following motion: If

There is no change in prescriptions, eyeglasses will be provided every four years, beginning January 1, 2011. Motion accepted. Report Accepted.

Remembrance: 22 deceased members. Report Accepted. 

Scholarship: Committee is concerned that there are too few applicants for scholarships. Suggestions were made; however, a motion was made to table the discussion until the next meeting. Motion was accepted. Report Accepted.

Social: Committee submitted its report on the June luncheon, the 50/50 raffle and crafters. The fall luncheon will take place on November 4. Letters announcing the date of the luncheon will be sent to each membership shortly. Report Accepted.

Travel: The next trip is to Peabody Essex Museum in Salem. Trips to Gettysburg & Amish Country, Christmas Show in Mansfield and the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge have been planned. Information about trips can be found on the BTU website.

Legislative: COLA bill was passed; however, further clarification of the bill is needed.

Data Processing: Chair met with the BTU IT person regarding the new website. New software and links have been added which makes the website easier to navigate.

The security of the website continues to be monitored.

Membership: There are 2632 members. The chair sent out 64 letters to prospective members. She received 29 requests to receive membership information, many of whom sent back membership cards.

Chairman’s Report: Sheriff Andrea Cabral will speak at the September 30th business meeting. Her discussion topic will be identity theft.

The Golf tournament has been named for Rose-Marie Donovan. Chairman received many inquiries as to how to donate in her memory. The tournament is set for October 11 at 8:30. Flyers for the tournament were given to the Board and they will be available for the membership at the September 30 business meeting.

Parking for the November luncheon may be a problem since the University of Massachusetts has usurped the parking lot, leaving very little spaces for the BTU. Chairman noted that Pat Connolly is attempting to negotiate with UMass.

However, it was suggested that those attending the luncheon should be notified that parking may be a problem and that carpooling should be encouraged. Report Accepted.

Old Business: Request by treasurer to have another driver refresher course. Board was amenable to having another.

New Business: None

Motion to adjourn: Motion accepted – Meeting adjourned at 11:56 a.m.

Respectfully submitted, Marilyn F. Marion, RTC Secretary

INFORMATION FOR NEW RETIREES

When you retire, you are no longer a member of the Union because you no longer pay dues. And, you are no longer a member of the Health and Welfare Fund, which means you no longer have dental coverage and eyeglass coverage.

If you wish to continue your connection to the Union, you can join the Retired Teachers Chapter (RTC). The dues will be taken from your retirement check each month ($5 for teachers, $2.50 for paras).

The RTC offers a dental insurance benefit to its members for a fee each month. Our Dental Plan covers members only and their spouse. You can also carry over your dental coverage and eyeglass coverage.

Complete the information below and we will send you the application form.

Name: ____________________________

Address: __________________________

City/State/Zip: __________________________

E-mail: __________________________

Telephone: __________________________

Complete the information below and we will send you the application form.

Name: ____________________________

Address: __________________________

City/State/Zip: __________________________

E-mail: __________________________

Telephone: __________________________

Thank you for your interest.

Respectfully submitted by Linda E. McNamee, Remembrance Committee

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Gayle Marrow on stage at the Hatch Shell representing the Boston Teachers Union.

In support of Gayle Marrow: Front L - R: Stephanie Marrow, Stephanie Marrow (the younger), Jasmine Cole-Marrow, Ronald Sprattling, Maya Sprattling, Ronald Johnson; Back L - R: Rasheed Sprattling, Valerie Johnson.


Brenda Chaney and Isabel Colonette.

BLA teacher Cathy O'Flaherty and husband Tony.

Haydee Irizarry, Jill Duckowney, Isabel Colonette, Cheryl Kelly and Marnie Colantuoni.

L-R in Green Shirts, Perry Resource Room teacher Becky Simon, Tynan Science teacher Christine Martin, Tito Flores, and in purple jacket, Perry U4 para Deb Kane.

The Perry School: Front: Tito Flores, Carolina Flores, Catherine Flores, Judy Nea, Patty Nee, Becky Simon, Richard Squillante, Eileen Hallissey, Jeff Dunney, Christine Martin, Eileen Hallissey’s son; Back: Amy Marx holding son Bryce, Christa Rosas, Phil Robinson, Stephanie Clark, Cheryl Pedone, Tish Broderick, Kris Graham, Deb Kane.

(Green shirts say Perry Sharks: Taking a Bite out of Cancer.)

L-R Sherry Pedone, Cheryl Kelly, Brenda Chaney, Angela Cristiani and Isabel Colonette.

making strides against breast cancer

Photos by Michael J. Maguire

November, 2010